

# Beyond borders? Africans prefer self-reliant development but remain skeptical of free trade and open borders

---

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 433 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Jaynisha Patel**

## Summary

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) opened for business on January 1, 2021, promising opportunities for people from all socio-economic strata to share in economic growth in the world's largest free-trade zone. Expected to cover 54 African countries, with a combined gross domestic product of about U.S. \$2.2 trillion, the AfCFTA is projected to generate increased cross-border trade and investment volumes, technology transfers, and income levels, lifting 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty by 2035 (Abrego et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020a).

Ambitious at the best of times, the AfCFTA faces a multitude of hurdles to effective implementation, from weaknesses in trade infrastructure, human capital, and information and communications technology to unresolved strategic and regulatory considerations, including the absence of a shared trading currency (Albert, 2019; Erasmus, 2020).

The hurdles – and the stakes – rise even higher as the COVID-19 pandemic shifts the patterns of interconnectedness for Africa and the world, highlighting the vulnerability of global supply chains (Chudik et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020a). According to the World Bank (2020b), every region across the world has been subject to growth downgrades. The World Economic Outlook estimates that sub-Saharan African economies contracted by 3% in 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2020). For African economies dependent on the exploitation and exportation of natural resources through agriculture, mining, and forestry (Hawker, 2020), major supply-chain disruptions only heighten the need for self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, development assistance to the continent has stagnated. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (2020) Human Development Data, development assistance as a percentage of gross national income has remained between 2.3% and 2.8% over the past decade and is expected to decline as developed nations reduce their aid budgets amid growing pressure from their populations to allocate resources internally (Wintour, 2021).

Successfully implementing the AfCFTA in the face of these pressures will require political will as well as the buy-in of ordinary Africans whose labor, capital, and knowledge will form the lifeblood of a single market.

Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 18 African countries in late 2019 and 2020 suggest that many Africans are yet to be persuaded of the benefits of free trade. Sizeable proportions of the population – more than half in some countries – are skeptical of opening their borders to businesses and products from other countries or regions, preferring that their government protect domestic producers. In practice, most say that crossing international borders in their region for work or trade is difficult.

When it comes to development, a majority of Africans welcome the economic and political influence of the United States, China, and other international players. But they are more inclined toward self-reliance than toward external loans and global interdependence.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys were completed in 18 countries between August 2019 and March 2020 before fieldwork was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Round 8 surveys started up again in October 2020 and are expected to cover a total of at least 35 countries.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. This 18-country analysis is based on 26,777 interviews (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, each country is weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

## Key findings

### Free trade

- On average across 18 countries, Africans are almost evenly divided in their views on free trade: 47% support policies that protect domestic industries, while 49% prefer open borders.
  - Resistance to open borders is particularly strong in Tunisia (70%), Lesotho (63%), Botswana (62%), and Gabon (60%).
- But a majority (58%) want their governments to allow foreign-owned retail shops in order to ensure a wide selection of low-cost consumer goods.
- A slim majority (55%) of Africans also support the free movement of people and goods across international borders in their region. Botswana is the only country where a clear majority (68%) prefer limiting cross-border movement in the region.
  - Across countries, levels of support for free cross-border movement have changed considerably over time, including a 27-percentage-point increase in Lesotho and a 25-point drop in Sierra Leone since 2014/2015.
- On average, West and East Africans favour trade openness more than Southern Africans.
- In practice, only two in 10 Africans say they find it easy to cross borders for work or trade.
  - Kenyans, Ivoirians, Burkinabè, and Gabonese are much more likely to report difficulties crossing borders than in the previous survey round (2016/2018).
  - Across 16 countries, reports that crossing borders is difficult have increased by 9 percentage points since 2014/2015.
  - West Africans are least likely to say it is easy to cross borders in their region.

### Development assistance

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Africans want their countries to finance their national development from their own resources rather than rely on external loans.
  - A preference for development without foreign aid is the majority view in all surveyed countries except Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, and Angola.
- Africans are divided as to whether foreign assistance and loans should come with conditionalities.
  - A slim majority (54%) oppose strict donor/lender requirements for how the funds can be used.

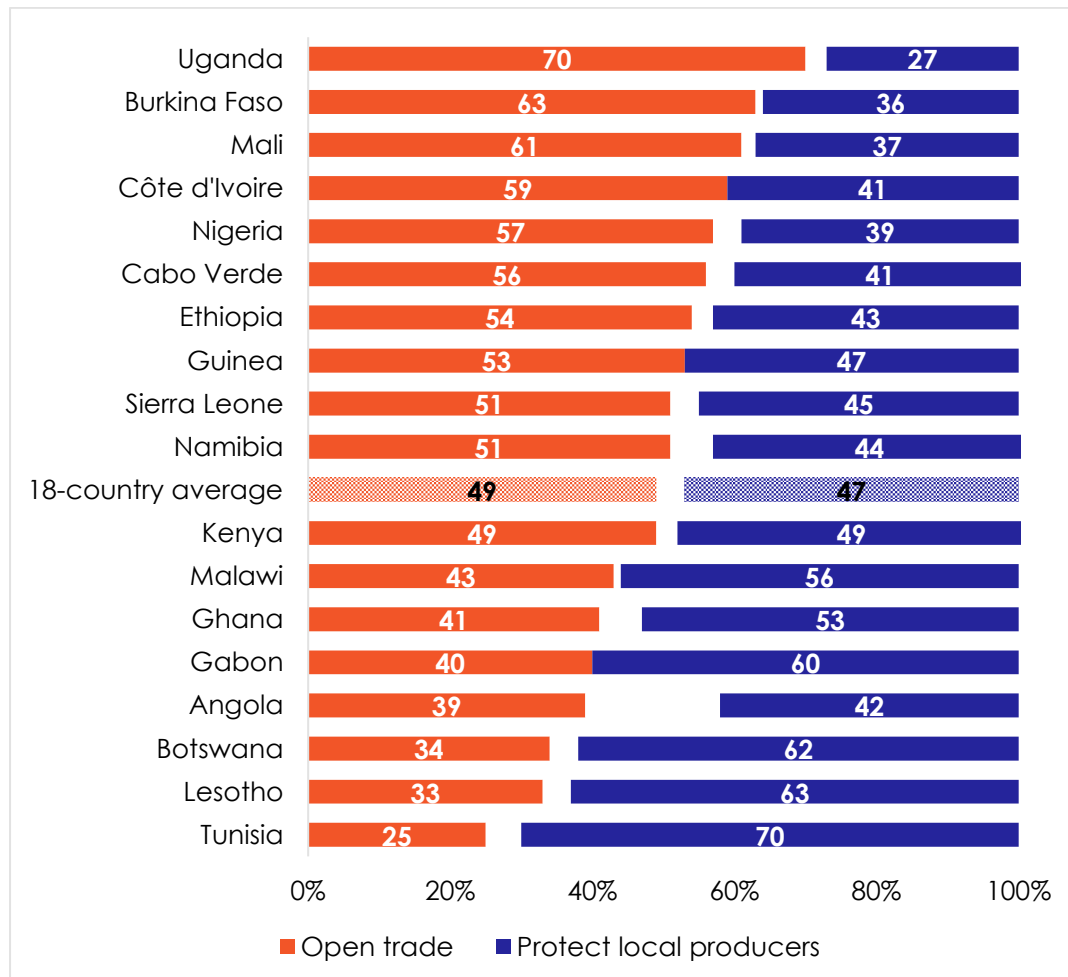
- Half (50%) do not want conditionalities requiring receiving countries to promote democracy and human rights.
- Despite reservations about strings attached to foreign assistance, Africans generally welcome the economic and political influence of China (59%), the United States (58%), and other powers, as well as of the African Union, the United Nations, and regional bodies.

### Trade and cross-border movement

Understanding how Africans perceive economic integration is critical for implementation of the AfCFTA. This section unpacks popular views on free trade and free movement of people for work. What emerges is a deeply divided continent, with large variations across countries.

On average, Africans are almost evenly split in their views on free trade for the sake of development. Across the 18 countries surveyed, about half (49%) say their country must open its borders to imports in order to develop, but almost as many (47%) favour limiting international trade for the sake of protecting local producers (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Open trade vs. protection of local producers | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



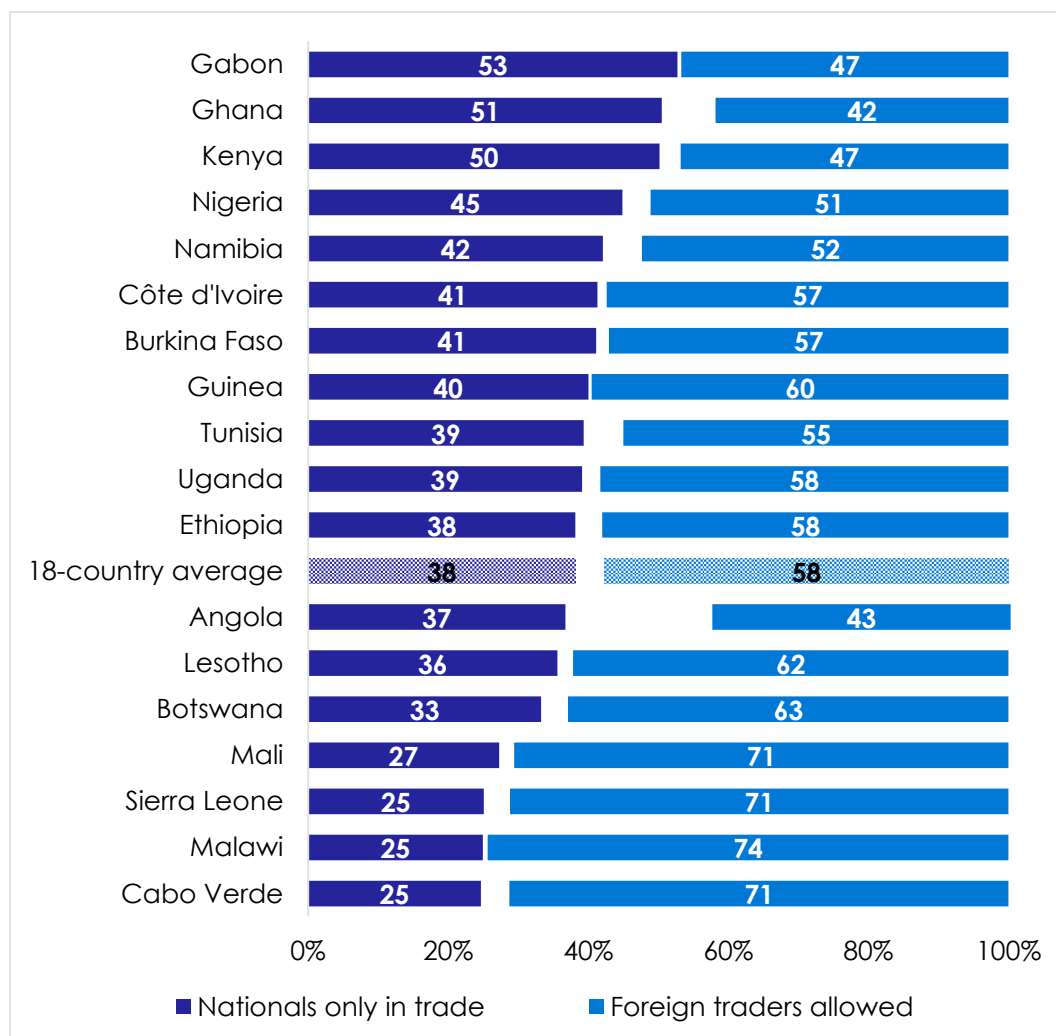
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: In order to develop, our country must rely on trade with the rest of the world, including by opening our borders to foreign imports.  
 Statement 2: In order to develop, our country must rely on local production and protect local producers from foreign competition.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Support for free trade is highest in Uganda (70%), Burkina Faso (63%), and Mali (61%). But similarly strong majorities support protectionism for domestic producers in Tunisia (70%), Lesotho (63%), and Botswana (62%) (for a more detailed analysis of views in member countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), see Stuurman, 2020). Emblematic of the continent, Kenyans are evenly split (49% each) on the question of free trade vs. protectionism.

Even though about half of Africans want to protect domestic producers, considerably fewer (38%) want to limit their choice of consumer goods to domestic products. Across 18 countries, a majority (58%) prefer that their government continue to permit foreigners to set up shops in the country to ensure a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods (Figure 2).

Gabon and Ghana are the only countries where more than half of respondents endorse limiting retail trade to their own citizens (53% and 51%, respectively). At the other end of the spectrum, more than seven in 10 respondents favour allowing foreign traders in Malawi (74%), Cabo Verde (71%), Sierra Leone (71%), and Mali (71%).

**Figure 2: Trade by nationals only vs. foreigners allowed | 18 countries | 2019/2020**

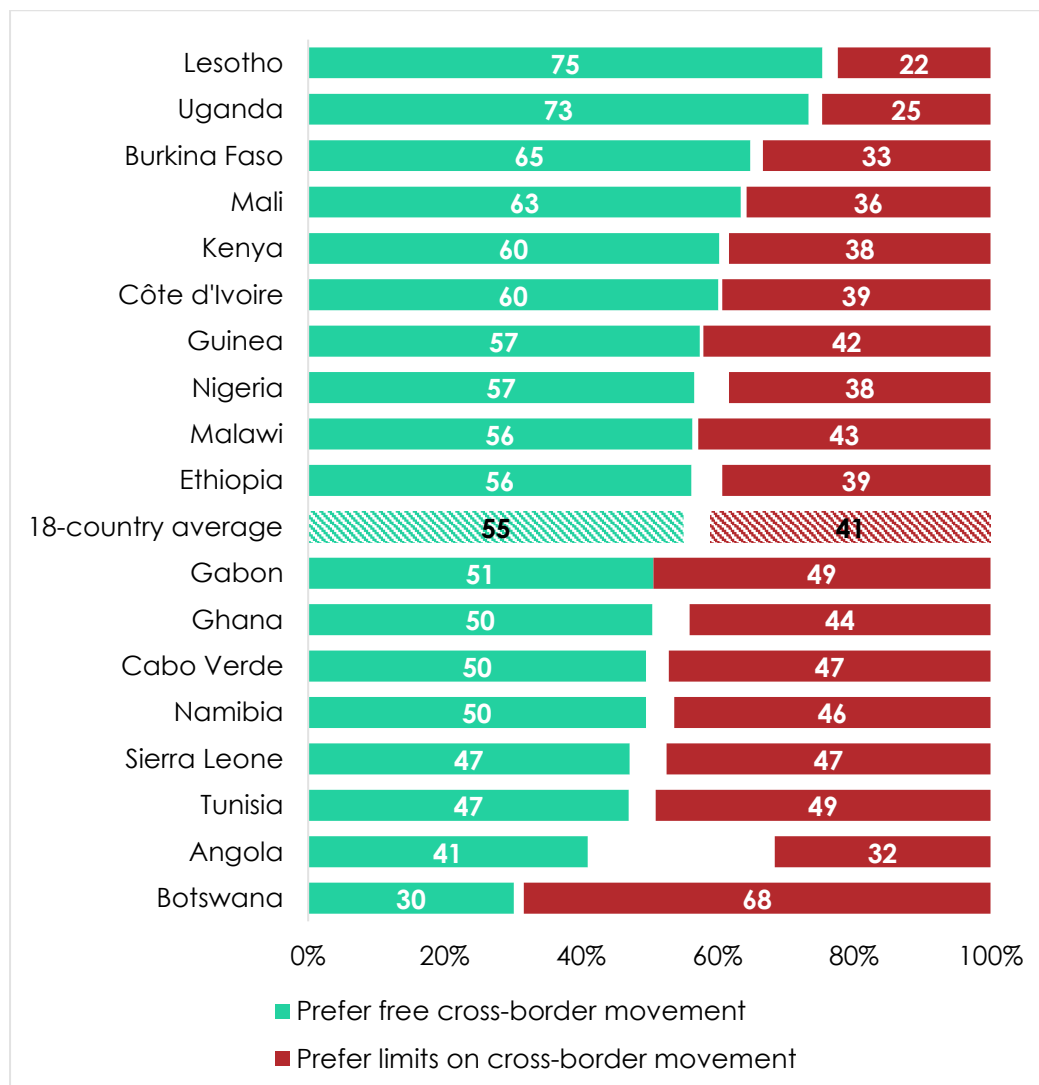


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: The government should only allow citizens and companies of our own country to trade in consumer goods, even if this means we will have fewer goods or higher prices.  
 Statement 2: The government should continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in this country to ensure we have a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

The ability to cross international borders is important for many Africans who trade or work in neighbouring countries. Earlier Afrobarometer research has shown that the main reasons Africans cite for wanting to emigrate are to find work and escape economic hardship, and their most preferred destination is another country within their region (Sanny, Logan, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). In some countries, cross-border movement has fueled anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Across the 18 countries surveyed in 2019/2020, a slim majority (55%) of respondents favour free movement of people across borders for work, while four in 10 (41%) prefer limiting the cross-border movement of people and goods (Figure 3).

The countries whose citizens are most open to free movement across borders are Lesotho (75%) and Uganda (73%). Botswana are by far the most strongly in favour of limiting cross-border movement (68%), followed by Tunisians (49%), Gabonese (49%), Cabo Verdeans (47%), and Sierra Leoneans (47%).

**Figure 3: Free vs. limited movement across borders | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: People living in [your region] should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.  
 Statement 2: In order to protect their own citizens, governments should limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

On average across 16 countries surveyed regularly since 2014/2015, the preference for free movement across borders remains virtually unchanged (-1 percentage point) (Figure 4). However, double-digit declines in support for free movement are recorded in Sierra Leone (-25 percentage points), Burkina Faso (-16 points), Kenya (-16 points), and Guinea (-14 points). On the other hand, three countries show double-digit increases in support for free cross-border movement: Lesotho (+27 percentage points), Namibia (+13 points), and Gabon (+11 points).

**Figure 4: Change in support for free movement across borders (percentage points)**  
 | 16 countries\* | 2014-2020

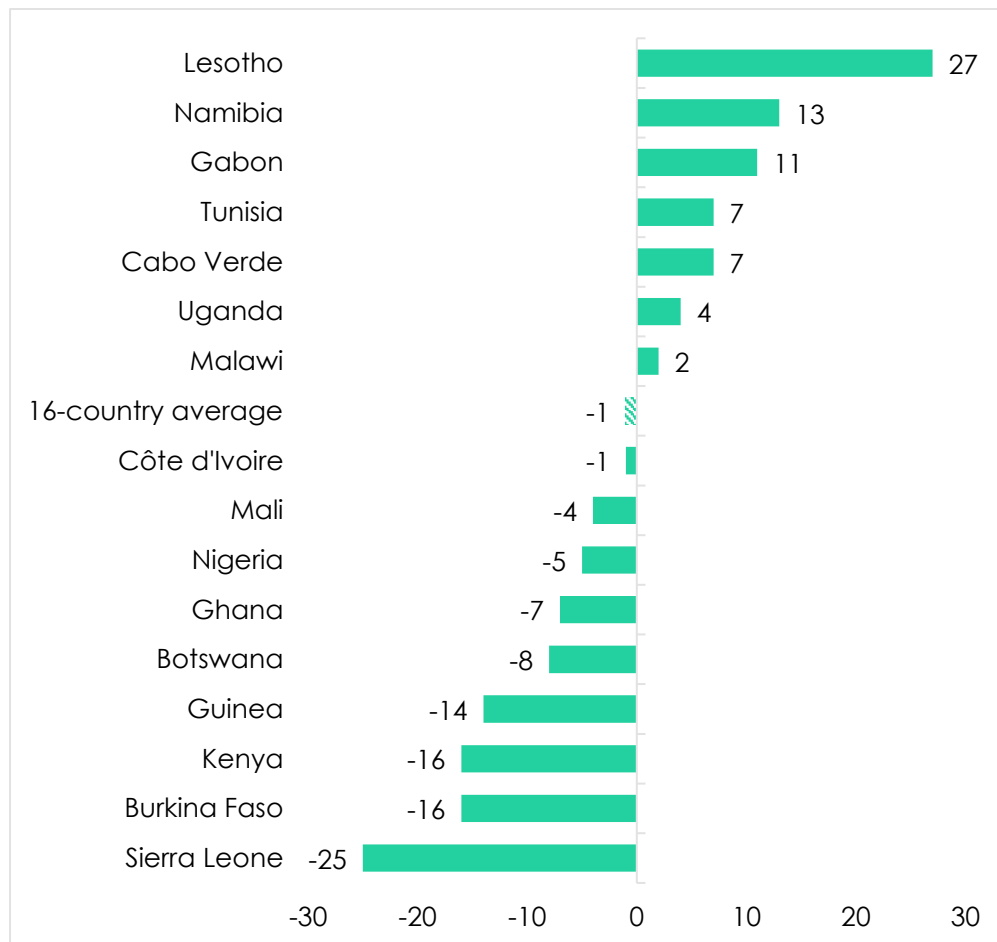


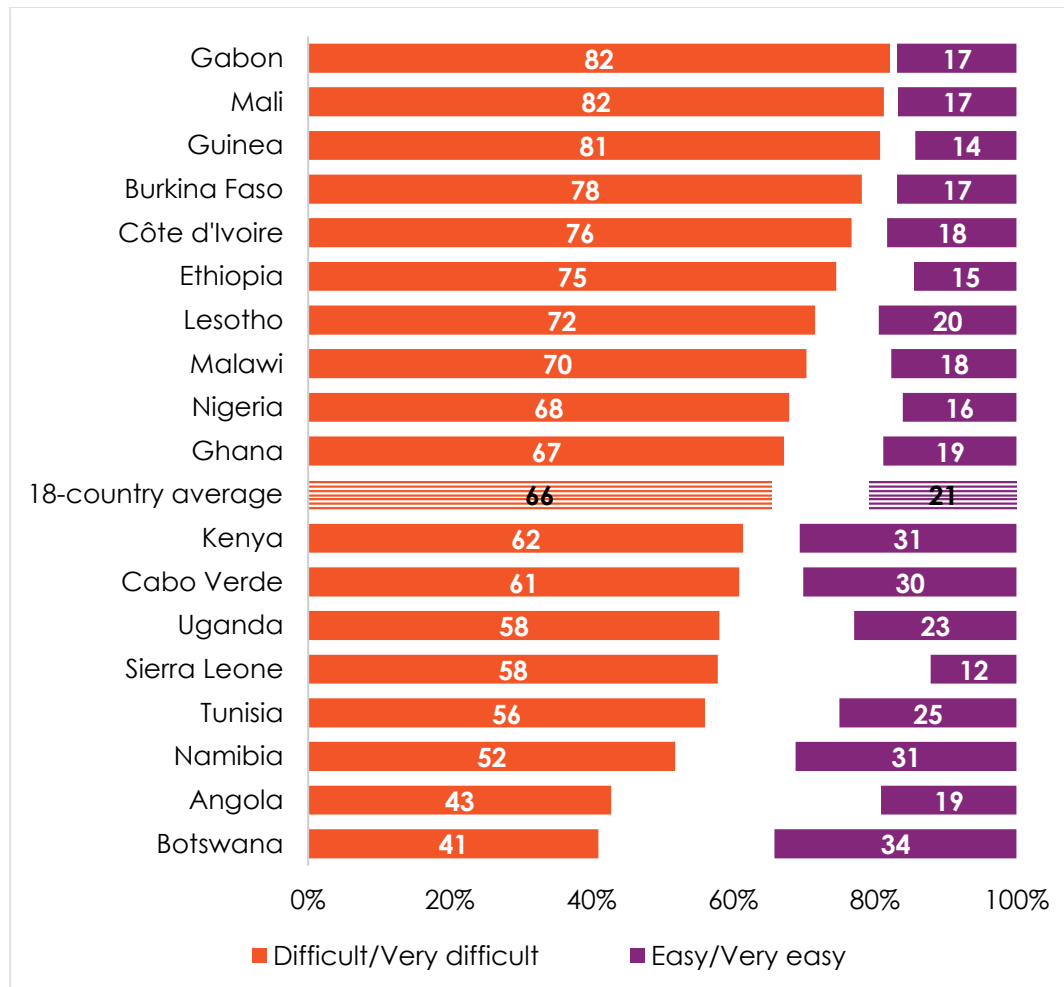
Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2014/2015 and 2019/2020 in the proportion of respondents who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that people in their region should be able to move freely across international borders.

\*Angola and Ethiopia were not surveyed in 2014/2015.

Despite mixed views on whether people should be able to cross international borders freely, most Africans are in agreement that in practice, it's not easy to do so. On average, two-thirds (66%) of respondents say it is “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross borders to work or trade, while only one in five (21%) describe it as easy (Figure 5).

Citizens in francophone West and Central African countries find it most challenging to cross borders to work or trade: Gabon (82%), Mali (82%), Guinea (81%), Burkina Faso (78%), and Côte d'Ivoire (76%). The perceived difficulty of cross-border movement is lowest in three Southern African countries – Botswana (41%), Angola (43%), and Namibia (52%) – although even there, more people say it's difficult than say it's easy.

**Figure 5: Difficulty crossing borders | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in [insert region] to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Crossing borders for work or trade appears to be growing more difficult for many Africans. Across the 16 countries where this question was asked in both 2016/2018 and 2019/2020, the proportion who say that crossing borders is difficult has increased by 9 percentage points (Figure 6). Sierra Leone is the only country where this perception decreased (-17 percentage points), while neighbouring Guinea records an increase (+11 points). Even larger increases are seen in Kenya (+24 points), Côte d'Ivoire (+22 points), Burkina Faso (+22 points), Gabon (+20 points), and Namibia (+18 points).

The continent's most economically vulnerable are rendered most immobile when it comes to working or trading in other countries. Based on Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI)<sup>1</sup>, the findings show that people experiencing high lived poverty are 13 percentage points more likely than those with no lived poverty to say that crossing borders is difficult (71% vs. 58%) (Figure 7).

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

**Figure 6: Changes in perceived difficulty of crossing borders (percentage points)**  
 | 16 countries\* | 2016-2020

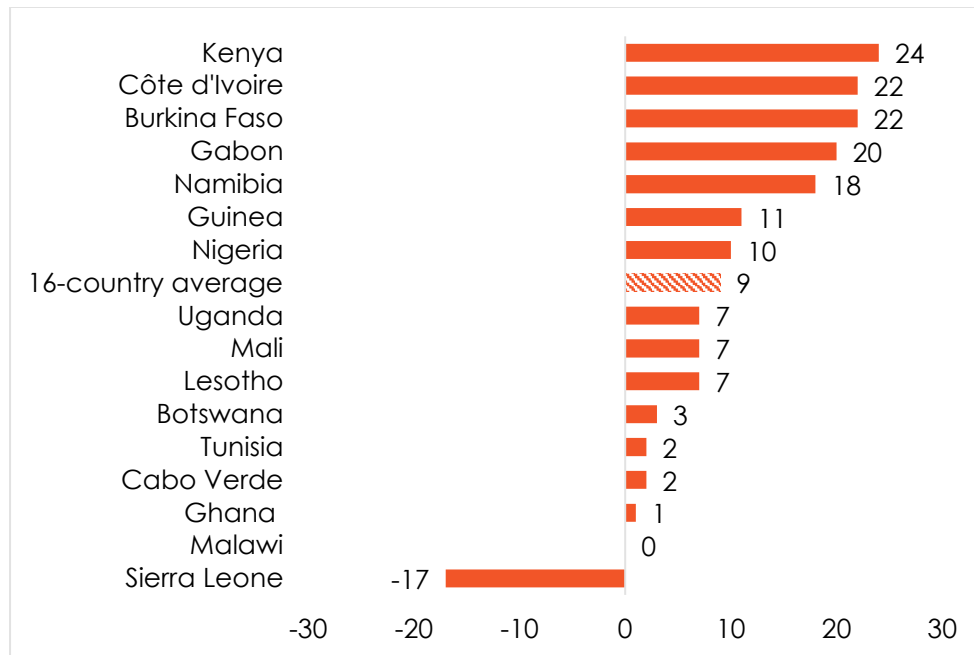
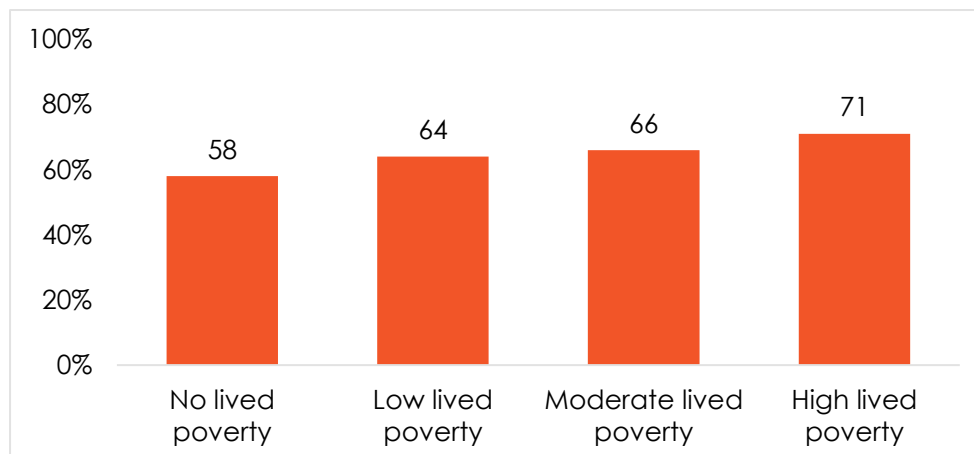


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2016/2018 and 2019/2020 in the proportion of respondents who say that crossing international borders is “difficult” or “very difficult.” A positive number indicates that it has gotten more difficult to cross borders in the region.  
 \*Angola and Ethiopia were not surveyed in 2016/2018.

**Figure 7: Difficulty crossing borders | by lived poverty | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in [your region] to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say “difficult” or “very difficult”)

Table 1 summarizes each of these key indicators regarding openness to international trade and movement, as well as the difficulty that people experience in crossing borders. A few key points stand out.

First, at the regional level, it is evident that in terms of “support for openness” to trade and movement – the first three indicators – overall demand is considerably higher in East and West Africa than in Southern Africa. This is especially true when it comes to support for open



trade: Southern Africans are much more inclined to support protection of local producers rather than openness to imports and trade. Southern Africans are also less supportive of free movement across borders than their counterparts in East and West Africa. However, Southerners equal West Africans, at levels somewhat higher than in East Africa, in their support for allowing foreign traders.

**Table 1: Summary of openness indicators | 18 countries | 2019/2020**

	Support open trade	Allow foreign traders	Support free movement across borders	Easy to move across borders
<b>East Africa</b>				
Ethiopia	54%	58%	56%	14%
Kenya	49%	47%	60%	31%
Uganda	70%	58%	73%	23%
<b>Average (3 countries)</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>West Africa</b>				
Burkina Faso	63%	57%	65%	17%
Cabo Verde	56%	71%	50%	30%
Côte d'Ivoire	59%	57%	60%	18%
Ghana	41%	42%	50%	19%
Guinea	53%	60%	57%	14%
Mali	61%	71%	63%	17%
Nigeria	57%	51%	57%	16%
Sierra Leone	51%	71%	47%	12%
<b>Average (8 countries)</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Southern Africa</b>				
Angola	39%	43%	41%	19%
Botswana	34%	63%	30%	34%
Lesotho	33%	62%	75%	20%
Malawi	43%	74%	56%	18%
Namibia	51%	52%	50%	31%
<b>Average (5 countries)</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>North Africa</b>				
Tunisia	25%	55%	47%	25%
<b>Central Africa</b>				
Gabon	40%	47%	51%	17%
<b>18-country average</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>21%</b>
	<20%	20-29%	30-39%	
	40-49%	50-59%	>=60%	

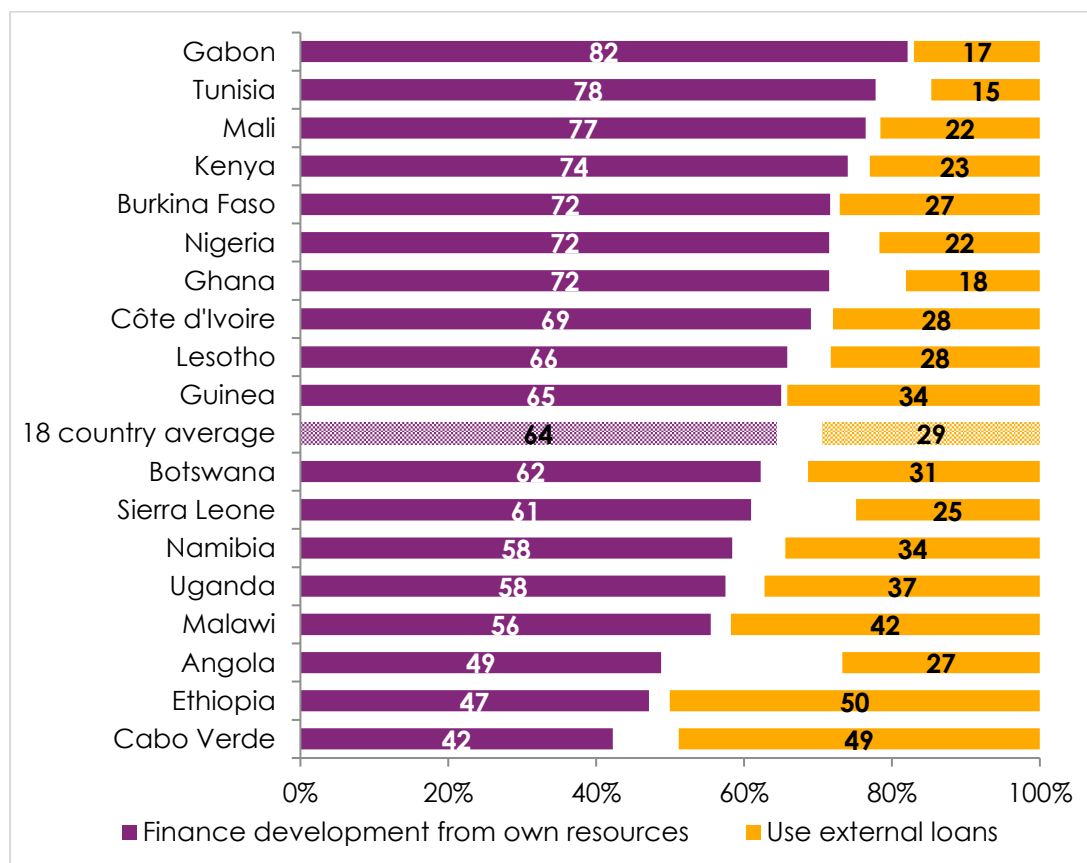
Mali stands out as the only country that scores in the highest category of support for openness on all three indicators, although Ugandans and Burkinabè are not far behind, scoring in the highest category on two indicators and falling only slightly below this level on the third. Angolans, in contrast, indicate far lower support for openness across all three indicators. Botswana and Lesotho show more contradictory patterns. Botswana report some of the lowest levels of support for both trade and movement, alongside high support for allowing foreign traders to operate in their country. Large numbers of Basotho reject open trade but support both accepting foreign traders and open borders.

Turning from support for openness to the experience of it – i.e. the reported ease of crossing borders – the tables are turned. No region averages more than one in four citizens who say it is easy. In West Africa, fewer than one in five (18%) respondents report that it is easy to cross borders in the region.

### Views on development cooperation

A majority of Africans want to be self-reliant and control their own democratic and economic affairs. Two-thirds (64%) say their countries should finance their development from their own resources, even if it means paying more taxes. Only three in 10 (29%) want their governments to rely on external loans to finance national development (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Funding national development: own resources vs. reliance on external loans | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: It is important that as an independent nation, we finance development from our own resources, even if it means paying more taxes.

Statement 2: We should use external loans for the development of the country, even if it increases our indebtedness to foreign countries and institutions.

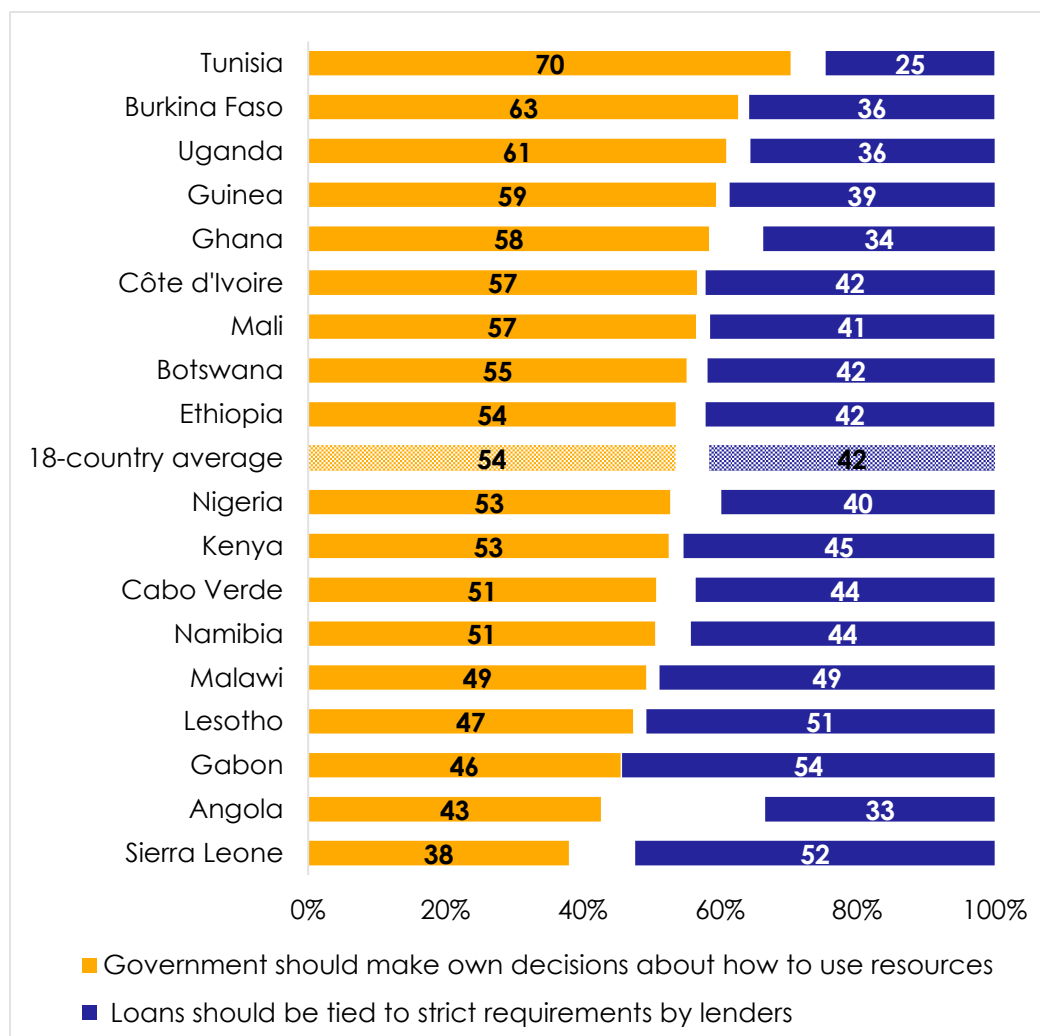
(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

The desire for development without foreign aid is the majority view in 15 of the 18 countries surveyed, including three-fourths of citizens in Gabon (82%), Tunisia (78%), and Mali (77%). The only countries where fewer than half of all citizens prefer self-reliance over external assistance are Cabo Verde (42%), Ethiopia (47%), and Angola (49%).

On average, a slight majority (54%) say foreign donors or lenders should allow governments to make their own decisions about how to use the resources rather than applying strict conditions about how the resources may be used. But a significant minority (42%) prefer such strict requirements (Figure 9).

Pluralities reject strict requirements from lenders in 14 of 18 countries, including large majorities in Tunisia (70%) and Burkina Faso (63%). Malawians are evenly split on the question (49% each). There is (narrow) majority support for conditionality only in Lesotho (51%), Gabon (54%), and Sierra Leone (52%). While Angola is among the countries with the least support for the government to take its own decisions (43%), it also records the largest proportion of citizens who agree with neither of the views or “don't know” (34%).

**Figure 9: Loan conditionalities on how funds are spent | 18 countries | 2019/2020**

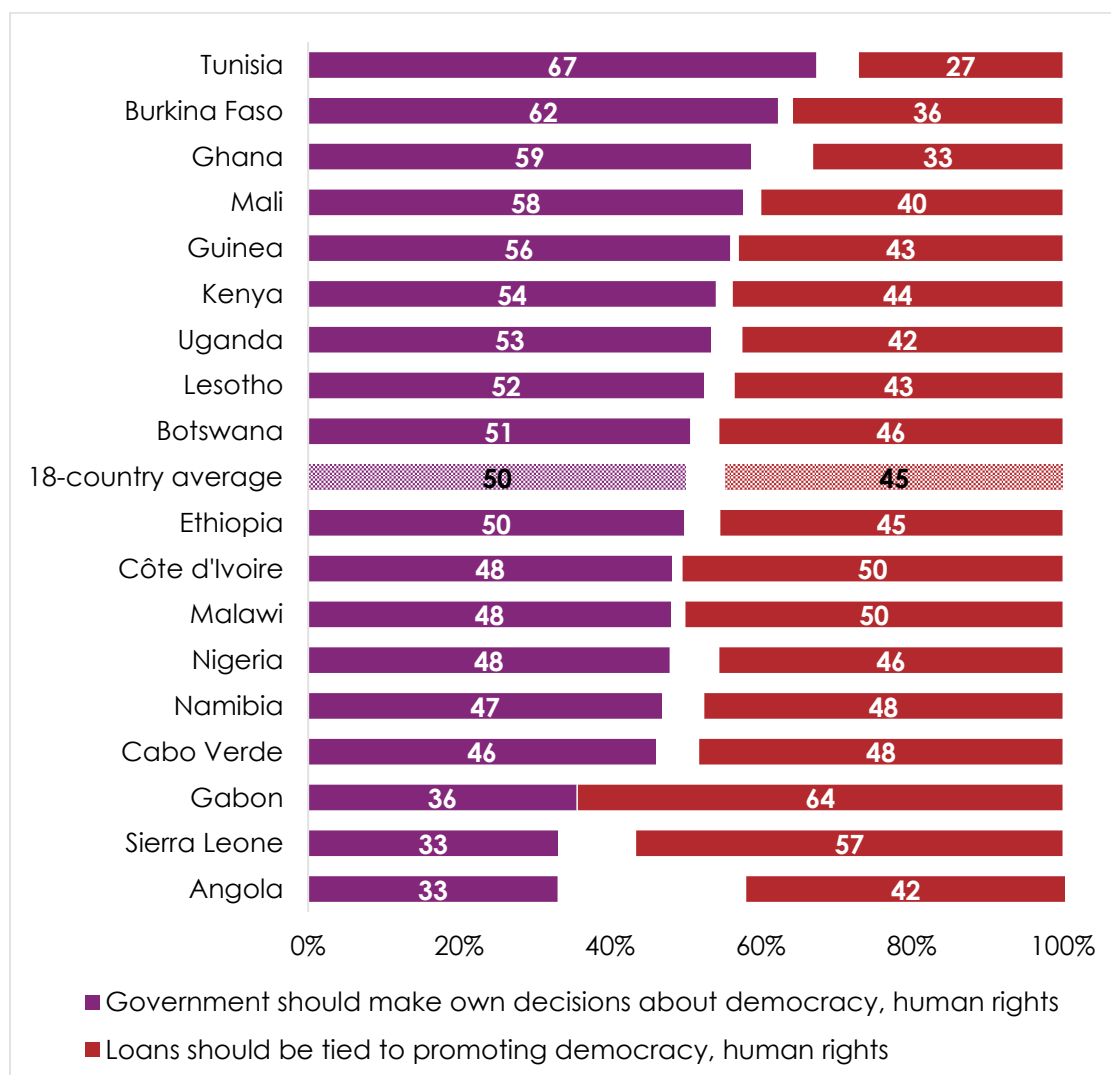


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your views?  
 Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to [this country], they should enforce strict requirements on how the funds are spent.  
 Statement 2: When other countries give [this country] loans or development assistance, they should allow our government to make its own decisions about how to use the resources.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Africans are more closely divided on whether donors and lenders should make sure that countries receiving assistance promote democracy and respect human rights, though there is slightly more tolerance for conditionality based on these factors than on spending requirements. On average, half (50%) want their governments to be free to make their own decisions on democracy and human rights, while almost as many (45%) want assistance to come with these strings attached (Figure 10).

As on the question of conditionality for how resources are used, Tunisians (67%) and Burkina Faso (62%) are most insistent on letting their governments take their own decisions. In contrast, a substantial majority in Gabon (64%) prefer democracy/human rights-based conditionality, as do a majority in Sierra Leone (57%) and pluralities in Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Namibia, Cabo Verde, and Angola.

**Figure 10: Should loans be tied to the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights? | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these statements is closest to your views?  
 Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to [this country], they should enforce strict requirements to make sure our government promotes democracy and respects human rights.  
 Statement 2: Even if other countries give [this country] loans or development assistance, our government should make its own decisions about democracy and human rights.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Table 2 summarizes the findings by country across all three indicators. It is evident that there is little connection between support for conditionality (last two columns) and overall preference for financing development with external loans. For example, Malawi has some of the highest support for conditionality and also relatively strong preference for using external loans, while in Gabon, even higher support for conditionality contrasts with some of the lowest support for using external loans. Tunisians and Ghanaians, on the other hand, opt for self-reliance across the board, with low support for using external development assistance and widespread rejection of conditions on those resources.

**Table 2: Summary of attitudes to development assistance** | 18 countries | 2019/2020

	Use external loans	Loans should be tied to strict requirements by lenders	Loans should be tied to promoting democracy, human rights
Gabon	17%	54%	64%
Sierra Leone	25%	52%	57%
Côte d'Ivoire	28%	42%	50%
Malawi	42%	49%	50%
Cabo Verde	49%	44%	48%
Namibia	34%	44%	48%
Botswana	31%	42%	46%
Nigeria	22%	40%	46%
Ethiopia	50%	42%	45%
Kenya	23%	45%	44%
Guinea	34%	39%	43%
Lesotho	28%	51%	43%
Angola	27%	33%	42%
Uganda	37%	36%	42%
Mali	22%	41%	40%
Burkina Faso	27%	36%	36%
Ghana	18%	34%	33%
Tunisia	15%	25%	27%
<b>18-country average</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>45%</b>
	<b>&lt;20%</b>	<b>20-29%</b>	<b>30-39%</b>
	<b>40-49%</b>	<b>&gt;=50%</b>	

### Whose influence is welcome?

International organizations and foreign powers may exert political and economic influence in Africa not just through loans or development assistance, but also through other types of economic investment and engagement and the way they wield their political influence. Do Africans in general appreciate the influence of these external actors, or resist it?

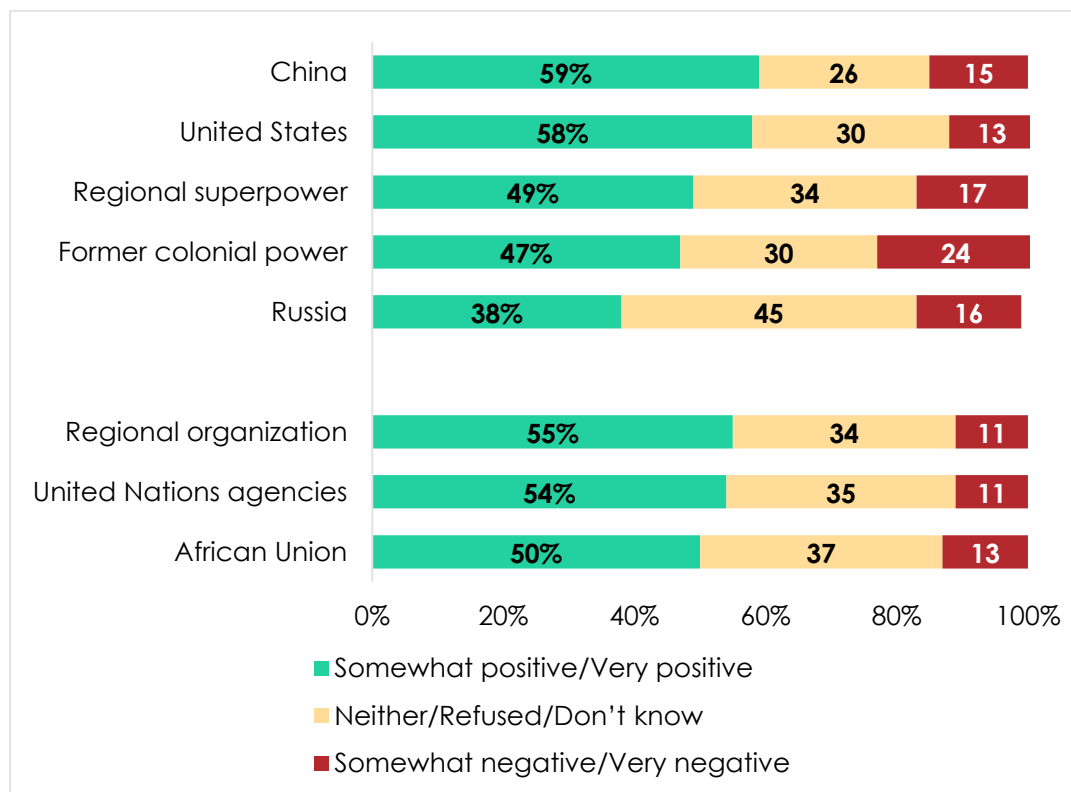
Africans' perceptions of external power brokers are far more often positive than negative. About six in 10 consider the influence of China (59%) and the United States (58%) to be positive, vs. just 15% and 13%, respectively, who see it as negative (Figure 11) (see also Sanny & Selormey, 2020).

Around half welcome the influence of their country's regional superpower (South Africa, Nigeria,<sup>2</sup> Kenya, or Algeria) (49%) and former colonial power (Britain, France, Portugal, or Germany) (47%). Russia's influence is less often seen in a favourable light (38%), although a plurality do not offer an opinion in either direction and only a small minority (16%) express a negative view.

Perceptions of development agencies and regional bodies are also predominantly positive: 50% positive vs. 13% negative for the African Union (AU), 54% vs. 11% for United Nations agencies, and 55% vs. 11% for the primary regional organizations (Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)).

Substantial proportions (ranging from 26% to 45%) of respondents did not provide a positive or negative assessment of these external influences, saying "Neither positive nor negative" or "Don't know" or refusing to answer the question.

**Figure 11: Rating external influencers** | 18 countries\* | 2019/2020



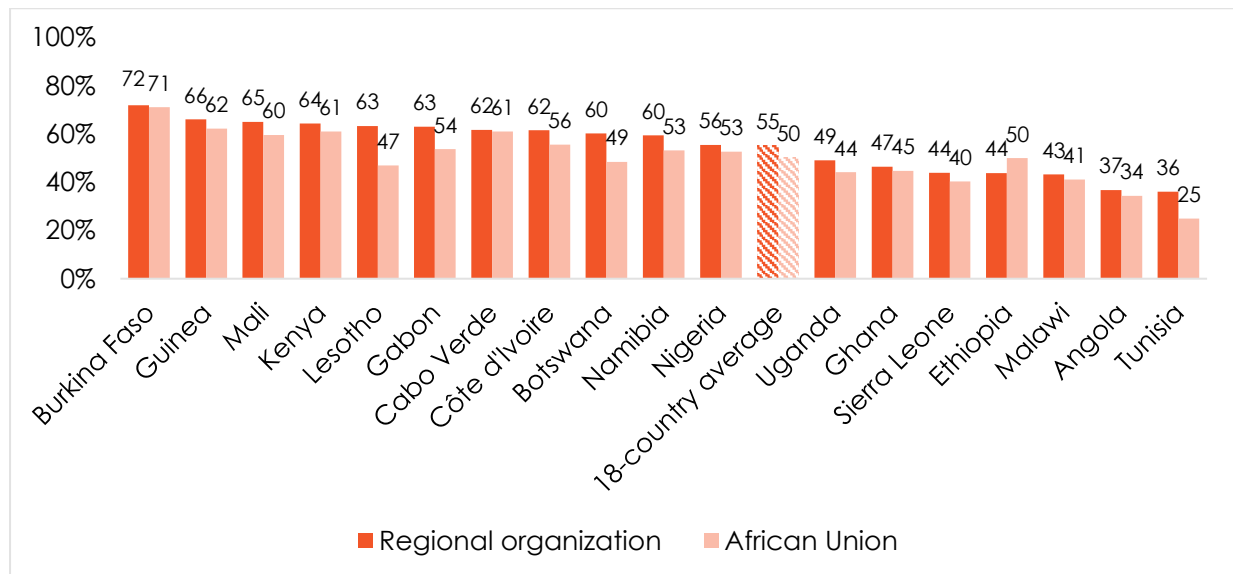
**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?

\*Note: Question on influence of regional superpower was not asked in Kenya. Question on influence of former colonial power was not asked in Ethiopia. Question on influence of Russia was not asked in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, and Uganda.

<sup>2</sup> Nigerians were asked about Ghana.

Ethiopia is the only surveyed country that rates the positive influence of the AU higher than that of its regional organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (50% vs. 44%) (Figure 12). Most of the countries rate their regional organizations more positively, with the largest gaps recorded in Lesotho (16 percentage points), Botswana (11 points), and Tunisia (11 points). The ratings are about equal for both organizations in Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, and Malawi.

**Figure 12: Rating influence of AU and regional organizations | 18 countries**  
 | 2019/2020



**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

Views on the influence of superpowers and former colonial powers vary greatly across countries. China's influence gets its most positive ratings in Cabo Verde (85%), Guinea (80%), Mali (80%), and Burkina Faso (80%), while the U.S. is most welcome in Cabo Verde (86%), Guinea (75%), Kenya (72%), and Burkina Faso (71%) (Figure 13).

Russia gets majority favourable assessments in just three countries – Guinea (64%), Mali (56%), and Burkina Faso (55%) – while most other majorities were neutral rather than negative.

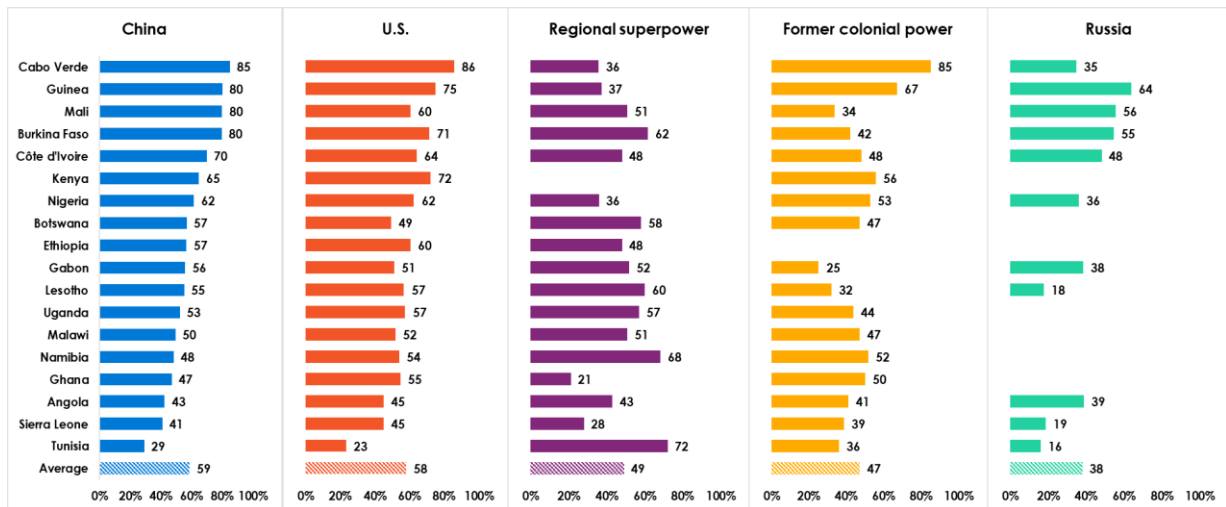
The influence of the regional superpower is most welcome in Tunisia (72%, referring to Algeria) and Namibia (68%, referring to South Africa) and least welcome in Ghana (21%, referring to Nigeria).

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

More than eight in 10 Cabo Verdeans (85%) see the influence of their former colonial power as positive, but only one in four Gabonese (25%) share this view.

The survey also shows interesting country patterns. Generally, Cabo Verdeans have high regard for external powers except for their regional superpower (Nigeria) and Russia, but none of the external influences receive highly positive ratings in Angola. Tunisians share low positive ratings (16%-36%) for all external influences except Algeria as the regional superpower (72%). In Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Ethiopia, positive assessments of external influences generally range from low to moderate.

**Figure 13: Rating influence of superpowers | 18 countries\* | 2019/2020**

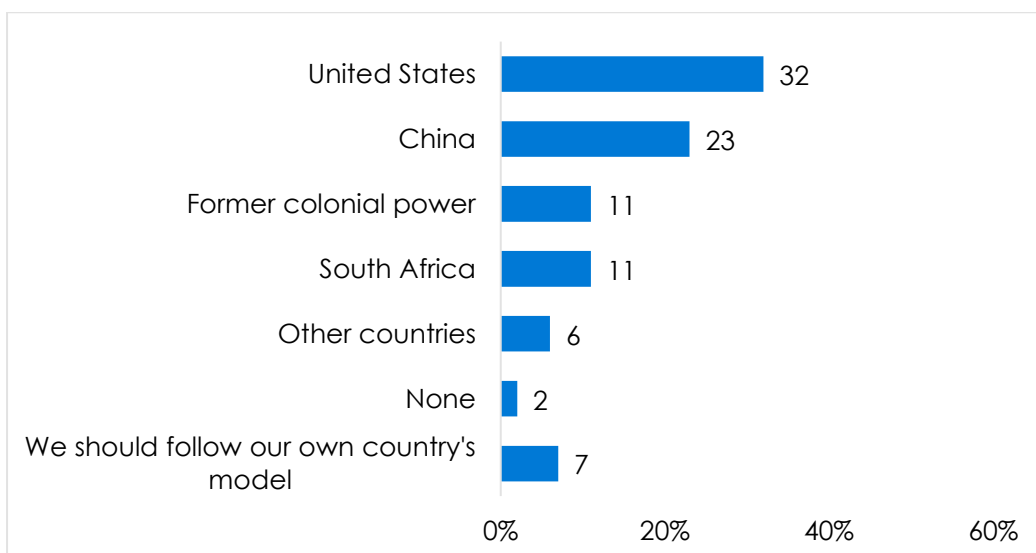


**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

\*Note: Question on influence of regional superpower was not asked in Kenya. Question on influence of Russia was not asked in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, and Uganda.

When it comes to the best development model for their countries, Africans are most likely to cite the United States (32%) (Figure 14). China is second (23%), while far fewer prefer the model of their former colonial power (11%), South Africa (11%), or others (6%).

**Figure 14: Best model for development | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



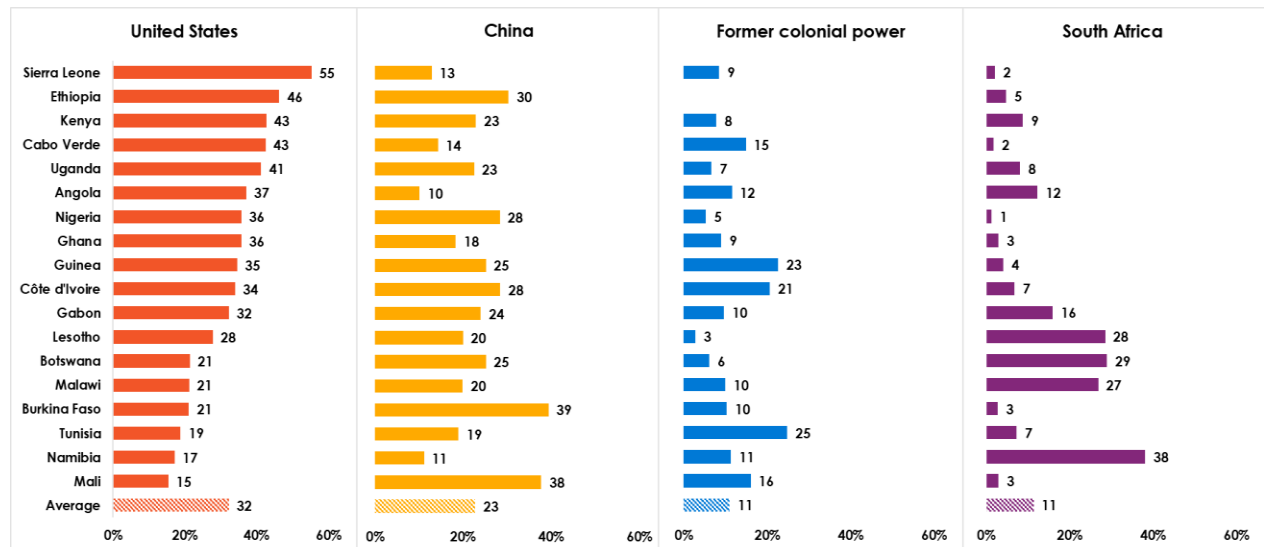
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country, or is there some other country in Africa or elsewhere, that should be our model?

In 11 of the 18 countries, the popular preference is strongest for the U.S. model. In Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Kenya, Cabo Verde, and Uganda, the U.S is preferred by at least four in 10 citizens, while China receives its highest marks in Burkina Faso (39%) and Mali (38%) (Figure 15). In Tunisia, the model of the former colonial power (Algeria) gets the most votes (25%),



while the U.S. and China tie at 19% each. As the former colonial power, France also rates well in Guinea (23%) and Côte d'Ivoire (21%), although the U.S. and China score higher. South Africa's model largely outranks the U.S. and China in the neighbouring countries of Namibia (38%), Botswana (29%), Lesotho (28%), and Malawi (27%).

**Figure 15: Best model for development | 18 countries | 2019/2020**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country, or is there some other country in Africa or elsewhere, that should be our model?*

## Conclusion

The AfCFTA may hold the potential to unlock local development opportunities through an inclusive free market. However, the success of the AfCFTA will depend on the ease of cross-border trade in goods and services, as well as the potential benefits to ordinary Africans. Africans across 18 countries are roughly evenly divided on the question of opening borders to trade vs. closing them to protect local producers. So negative or uncertain attitudes toward trade may still be a serious impediment to the AfCFTA, especially in those countries (such as Tunisia, Lesotho, and Botswana) where protectionist sentiments are strongest.

But the concrete realities of moving goods and people across borders will also be critical, and there is much work to be done here. Currently, two-thirds of Africans across 18 countries face difficulties moving around their region, including for work, and the situation has gotten substantially worse in the past few years. This is despite the fact that more than half (55%) of Africans support the free movement of people and goods across borders. Policies aimed at easing regulations and reforming border control, with specific attention to promoting agency for Africans living on the fringes of economic inclusion, will be vital to the success of a free trade area.

Perceptions of fostering interconnectedness vary greatly between countries, highlighting local dynamics that underpin the facilitation of the AfCFTA. Perhaps one way to address this is the establishment of regional autonomous oversight bodies that assess domestic challenges and put forward recommendations that help overcome local and regional barriers to the success of the AfCFTA.

Deepening interconnectedness as a means of entrenching peace and building self-reliant nations requires broad access to the free trade area for regular Africans. Otherwise, the AfCFTA will fail to take advantage of the labour, skills, and knowledge of the very populations that will determine its success.

## References

- Abrego, L., et al. (2020). The African Continental Free Trade Area: Potential economic impact and challenges. International Monetary Fund Staff Discussion Note No. 20/04.
- Albert, T. (2019). The African Continental Free Trade Agreement: Opportunities and challenges. Geneva: CUTS International.
- Chudik, A., Mohaddes, K., Hashem Pesaran, M. K., Raissi, M., & Rebucci, A. (2020). Economic consequences of Covid-19: A counterfactual multi-country analysis. VoxEU/CEPR.
- Erasmus, G. (2020). The AfCFTA's institutions are vital for effective implementation. Tralac (Trade Law Centre).
- Hawker, E. (2020). COVID-19: The impact on developing economies. BusinessBecause.
- Human Rights Watch. (2020). South Africa: Widespread xenophobic violence. 17 September.
- International Monetary Fund. (2020). World Economic Outlook databases. 13 October.
- Mattes, R. (2020). Lived poverty on the rise: Decade of living-standard gains ends in Africa. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 62.
- Sanny, J. A. N., Logan, C., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2019). In search of opportunity: Young and educated Africans most likely to consider moving abroad. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 288.
- Sanny, J. A. N., & Selormey, E. (2020). Africans regard China's influence as significant and positive, but slipping. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 407.
- Stuurman, Z. (2020). Citizens of Southern African Customs Union hold mixed views on free trade and open borders. Afrobarometer Dispatch 411.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2020). Human development data.
- Wintour, P. (2021). UK diplomats told to cut up to 70% from overseas aid budget. Guardian. 26 January.
- World Bank. (2020a). The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and distributional effects.
- World Bank. (2020b). The global economic outlook during the COVID-19 pandemic: A changed world.

## Appendix

**Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 8 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds**

Country	Months when Round 8 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
<b>Angola</b>	Nov-Dec 2019	N/A
<b>Botswana</b>	July-Aug 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	Dec 2019	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	Dec 2019	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	Nov 2019	2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Dec 2019-Jan 2020	2013
<b>Gabon</b>	Feb 2020	2015, 2017
<b>Ghana</b>	Sept-Oct 2019	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Guinea</b>	Nov-Dec 2019	2013, 2015, 2017
<b>Kenya</b>	Aug-Sept 2019	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016
<b>Lesotho</b>	Feb-March 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Malawi</b>	Nov-Dec 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Mali</b>	March-April 2020	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
<b>Namibia</b>	Aug 2019	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
<b>Nigeria</b>	Jan-Feb 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	March 2020	2012, 2015, 2018
<b>Tunisia</b>	Feb-March 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
<b>Uganda</b>	Sept-Oct 2019	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017

**Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny** is Afrobarometer knowledge translation manager.  
Email: [jappiah@afrobarometer.org](mailto:jappiah@afrobarometer.org).

**Jaynisha Patel** is project leader for the Inclusive Economies project at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, based in Cape Town, South Africa. Email: [jpatel@ijr.org.za](mailto:jpatel@ijr.org.za).

Afrobarometer, a non-profit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 8 has been provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, Freedom House, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, GIZ, and Humanity United.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) or contact Bruno van Dyk ([bruno.v.dyk@afrobarometer.org](mailto:bruno.v.dyk@afrobarometer.org)) to discuss institutional funding.

For more information, please visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 433 | 23 March 2021